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FM AMEMBASSY DILI

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RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0847

RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC

RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI

RUCNMCM/MCC COLLECTIVE

RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC

RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC

RUEHLI/AMEMBASSY LISBON 0807

RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 0914

RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON 0741

RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 0661

RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 0622

RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA 0469

RUEHDT/AMEMBASSY DILI 2691

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 DILI 000096

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DEPT FOR EAP/MTS
USUN FOR RICHARD MCCURRY
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 3/9/2017

TAGS: PGOV PHUM KDEM KJUS UN AU VT TT

SUBJECT: DILI BISHOP SYMPATHIZES WITH REINADO

REF: DILI 095

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CLASSIFIED BY: Stanley Harsha, Charge d'Affaires, U.S. Embassy
Dili, Department of State.

REASON: 1.4 (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Bishop of Dili Alberto Ricardo da Silva told us in a March 9 meeting that he was reluctant to get involved in convincing dissident military leader Major Alfredo Reinado to surrender because he feared for the safety of Reinado if he surrenders to GOET authorities, and that the Catholic Church would be blamed if anything happened to Reinado. Ricardo da Silva's reluctance to intervene in the case also can be explained by his clear sympathy for Reinado as a defender of the downtrodden, being unjustly singled out while culpable Fretilin party members enjoy impunity. We had requested this meeting in part because President Xanana Gusmao on March 8 had told us that East Timor's two bishops were playing a role in persuading Reinado to surrender and we wanted to find out what that role might be. Da Silva also had strong concerns about the ongoing election process, citing delays in voter registration and the means to ensure that polling places are not subject to intimidation or violence. He noted, however, that he and "the people" viewed manipulation and threats by the ruling Fretilin party, or by gangs working on the party's behalf, as posing a greater security threat than that of Reinado's rebellion, which he said has now dispersed. End Summary.

¶2. (C) In a March 9 meeting in the office of Bishop of Dili Alberto Ricardo da Silva, Charge d'Affaires (CDA) asked da Silva if he is playing any role in persuading rebel military leader Alfredo Reinado to surrender. Ricardo da Silva asked CDA what would happen if Reinado was captured, saying he feared getting involved in the negotiation process because the Church would be responsible if he surrenders and is later killed. CDA told Ricardo da Silva that peaceful surrender is the best possible outcome as the current situation is very destabilizing, particularly during election time. CDA explained that the GOET and the International Stabilization Force (ISF) want only to bring Reinado in safely, and that the attention of the international community present in East Timor will be a further

deterrence to any harm coming to Reinado if he surrenders. Finally, the CDA noted that Reinado taking up arms is simply wrong and that he needs to place his trust in the justice system if rule of law is to be respected in East Timor. We also noted to Ricardo da Silva that the recent Dili District Court decision to sentence former Interior Minister Rogerio Lobato for distributing arms to civilians in May 2006 is a sign that the system does work, to which the Bishop responded that the appeals process and a possible amnesty law could still let Lobato walk free. (Note: President Xanana Gusmao on March 8 had told us that the two East Timor bishops were playing a role in persuading Reinado to surrender and we had requested meetings with the two bishops to find out more about that role. See Reftel. We hope to meet with Baucau Bishop Basilio do Nascimiento on March 12.)

¶3. (C) Ricardo da Silva said he had recently discussed the Reinado situation with Prime Minister Jose Ramos-Horta, and that Ramos-Horta insisted that Reinado must surrender. Ricardo da Silva claimed that Ramos-Horta softened his stance towards the fugitive after their meeting, publicly stating the next day that negotiations would be possible with Reinado. The Bishop told us that last summer Reinado had also paid a call on him to explain his intentions, leaving Ricardo da Silva convinced that Reinado did not pose a threat. He assessed Reinado as a hero seeking justice and protection for the suffering people from Fretilin excesses. (Note: Ricardo da Silva was among the Church leaders who organized a multi-week, protest involving up to 20,000 demonstrators against the then Prime Minister, Mari Alkatiri, in April-May 2005 and are regular critics of Alkatiri and the Fretilin party.) Though he agreed that Reinado should not flaunt the law, he indicated that he considered Reinado far less culpable than many others who remained free, including Alkatiri. The Bishop trusted Reinado's public promises to turn himself in once others had been brought to justice. He said he has not talked with Reinado recently and that he does not know how to contact him directly.

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¶4. (C) In response to our assertion that the current situation is creating an unstable and volatile climate that could hinder elections, Ricardo da Silva responded that Reinado's group has dispersed, is no longer a threat and that Reinado supports peaceful and free elections. On the contrary, he claimed that Fretilin is causing civil disorder in a desperate gambit to disrupt elections because of flagging public support. He pointed to a variety of reports he had received from priests in the districts indicating that Fretilin, or elements linked to it, were stockpiling weapons and intimidating voters. He cited reports from five sub-districts in Baucau where local civil servants had "more guns than Reinado," as well as the presence of nine "long-haired men with guns" in Ermera who intimidated people after the local youth disrupted political activities by Alkatiri, who is the Fretilin Secretary-General. He also told us that Fretilin supporters in Los Palos chanting "viva Alkatiri, viva Marxism" had protested in response to a limited Australian deployment there, allegedly prompting Gusmao to threaten to dispatch more Australian troops.

¶5. (C) Ricardo da Silva claimed that he received frequent calls from both Father David in Same and Father Natalino in Suai, both of whom have been rumored by various sources to have abetted Reinado. Ricardo da Silva said the priests were not Reinado sympathizers but rather were carrying out their priestly duties to attend to anyone in need. (Note: Father Natalino is the priest at the church in Suai where Emboffs met with Reinado in December 2006. Reinado and his men were clearly at ease in that environment.)

¶6. (C) The Bishop said the current social situation is "bad, but the Church has hope." He described significant poverty and suffering, with refugees congregating near religious facilities for nearly a year. He said the current government did not have the capability to handle the problems it faces.

¶7. (C) Ricardo da Silva read us a prepared list of election concerns, asking for USG assistance in pressuring the Government of East Timor and the United Nations. He informed us that the upcoming elections were very important to the people of East Timor, but reports from the villages indicated that voter registration was not going well, particularly in the western districts. He complained that the "Fretilin-run" Technical Secretariat for Election Administration (STAE) was inaccurately

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telling people that registration cards from the national assembly elections in 2001 did not need to be renewed, and asked for USG assistance in ensuring that the registration period be extended as many voters will not have time to register before the April 9 presidential elections. (Note: STAE is under the Ministry for State Administration, headed by Fretilin hardliner Anna Pessoa, hence the Bishop's characterization of it as "Fretilin run".) He plainly stated that "the people fear Fretilin's manipulation" and "Fretilin are the ones that do not want people to vote." Ricardo da Silva also asked CDA to consider whether the UN advisors have sufficient experience to ensure a fair election, negatively comparing this election process with the referendum on independence that the UN carried out in 1999. Furthermore, the Bishop insisted that there must be regulations to prevent members of the East Timorese military (F-FDTL) from visiting polling stations on polling day, saying that this would intimidate voters. When we asked him if the Church would support any political party in these elections, he said that it could not endorse any parties, but that the Church is required to help parishioners make a good choice, and therefore could advise voters to chose a party that cared about the people, not just about a small circle of elites.

¶8. (C) Comment: Bishop Ricardo da Silva clearly distrusts Fretilin and apparently supports much of what Reinado claims are his goals. While we do not take all of his anti-Fretilin claims at face value, they demonstrate the extent to which disillusionment with the ruling party and sympathy for anyone who will challenge them can impact even a mainstream, influential religious leader. We have no doubt that Bishop Ricardo da Silva will likely use the influence at his disposal to urge voters to oppose Fretilin in the upcoming presidential and parliamentary elections. What remains to be seen, however, is the degree to which he can influence a far-flung network of

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priests, many of whom are independently-minded. Embassy Dili plans to meet next week with Bishop Nascimento, who is based in Baucau, as well as with lower-level church figures to gauge where they stand on Reinado and the range of political issues discussed with Ricardo da Silva.

¶9. (SBU) Bio Notes: Bishop Ricardo da Silva will turn 64 in April and has spent nearly his entire career in East Timor. He attended seminary in Macau before being ordained in 1972. From 1972 to his appointment as Bishop in May 2004, Ricardo da Silva served in East Timor, except for the period from 1993-1994, when he served at the Vatican. During his Vatican posting, he visited Providence, Rhode Island, and Washington, DC, where he told us he testified before a Senate committee. He speaks Tetum, heavily-accented but proficient English, and possibly Bahasa Indonesia.

HARSHA